Ācārya Aśvaghoṣa's Vajrasūcī

Om Homage to the youthful Lord of Wisdom *(*Mañjunātha)

Having paid homage to the teacher of the world, Lord
of Speech *(Mañjughoṣa)*
With body, speech and mind
I [*Aśvaghoṣa*] will explain the Diamond Needle
(Vajrasūcī)
In conformity with the scripture. [1]

The *Vedas*, the *Smṛtis* are authorities
Speech conjoined with *dharma* (duty) and *artha*
interest are the authorities
He who doesn't accept authority of authority
Who will accept his speech as authority? [2]

(Ka) Here (in accordance to your view) *Brāhmaṇa* is the principle of all castes; to this we like to question here: Who is the *Brāhmaṇa*? Is the soul *Brāhmaṇa*? Or the birth body, knowledge, manners, acts, or Vedas *Brāhmaṇa*?

(Kha) There (in that context) the soul is not *Brāhmaṇa* because of on the authority of the *Veda*. The *Vedas* say-

(Ga) "*Om* the sun was an animal; the moon was animal and *Indra*, king of gods was an animal." Animals became gods. Even the *Śvapākās* (dog-eaters) became gods.

(Gha) Therefore, on the basis of the authority of *Vedas*, we think the soul is not *Brāhmaṇa*. This is also based on the authority of *(Mahā-) Bhārata*.

It is said in the *Bhārata:*

The seven hunters in Daśārṇa;
The deer in the *Kālañjar* hill;
The *cakravāka* (wild duck) in the *Śara* island; and
The swan in the *Mānas* lake [3]

They too, were born in *Kurukṣetra*
Well-versed *Brāhmaṇa* in the *Vedas.*[4]

(Nga) Therefore, on the authority of *Mahābharata* too, the possibility of seeing soul as in the hunter, deer, swan, and wild duck we think soul is nor *Brāhmaṇa.* It may be established also on the authority of *Mānavadharma.*

It is also said in the *Mānavadharma*:

Having studied the four *Vedas*
With all their branches in true-essence,
[Nevertheless] a *Brāhmaṇa* taking offerings from a *Śūdra*
Becomes a donkey.[5]

[Then he] becomes twelve lives as donkey;
Sixty lives as pig;
Seventy lives as dog;
So said by *Manu* [sage]. [6]

(Ca) Therefore on the authunticity of the *Mānavadharma* the soul is not *Brāhmaṇa.*

(Cha) The caste either is not *Brāhmaṇa.* Why? Because of the authority of the *Smṛti.* The *Smṛti* says thus:

[Sage] *Acala* was born from a she-elephant;
Keśapiṅgala from a she-owl;
Agastya from the *agasti* flower; and
Kauśika from *kuśa* grass.[7]

Kapila from the *kapilā* (grey cow);
Gautama from clump of reeds;
Droṇācārya from an earthern vase;
Tittiri from a patridge. [8]

Rāma was born from *Reṇukā;*
[Sage] *Ṛṣisriṅga* from a she-deer;
Vyāsa from a maid fisherwoman;
Kuśika from a *Śūdrikā* (a low caste woman).[9]

Viśvamitra from a *Caṇḍalī* (a mean woman);
Vasiṣṭha from *Urvaśī* (the celestial dancing maid);
The mothers of these [sages] are not she-*Brāhmaṇa;*
[But] are regarded as *Brāhmaṇa* by mundane customs. [10]

(Ja) Therefore, on the *Smṛti* authorities we think that birth is so far not *Brāhmaṇa.*

(Jha) Now if you accept, mother may be non- *Brāhmaṇa*, but if their father is *Brāhmaṇa*, then the son is *Brāhmaṇa.* If that is so, then the sons of maidservants conceive by *Brāhmaṇa* [fathers] also become *Brāhmaṇas*; but that is not agreeable to you.

(Ña) Furthermore, if the son of a *Brāhmaṇa* is *Brāhmaṇa*; then it would prove there is no *Brāhmaṇas*. Because in the contemporary times, whether all are born from a *Brāhmaṇa* father is

a doubtful. From the incept of *Brāhmaṇa* caste the wives of *Brāhmaṇas* had and still have illicit relations with all other castes, even the *Śūdras*, the lowest caste. Therefore, birth is not *Brāhmana*. It is also with confirmity to *Mānavadharma*, where it states:

It is also said in the *Mānavadharma*:

A *Brāhmaṇa* immediately degrades;
Who sells meat, lac, and salt ;
Who sells milk,
Will become *Śūdra* in three days. [11]

A sky-going *Brāhmaṇa* falls [from his psychic powers],
If he eats meat.
Having seeing the fall of *Brāhmaṇas*
Thereafter, meat [eating] was abandoned. [12]

(Ṭa) Therefore, on the authority of *Mānavadharma* birth is not the factor to be a *Brāhmaṇa*. If at all *Brāhmaṇa* is a factor to be a *Brāhmaṇa*, then even if after degradation also he should not become a *Śūdra*. Is it possible that even if a horse having defects becaome a pig? Therefore, birth is not the factor to be *Brāhmaṇa*.

(Ṭha) Body too is not *Brāhmaṇa*. If it is so, then the fire also beomes a co-partner to the *Brahminicide*. In addition, the relatives who burt the dead also a co-partner to the *Brahminicide*. Again, the *Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas* and *Śūdras* those who are born from a semen of the *Brāhmaṇa* or *Kṣatriya, Vaiśya* and *Śūdra* women conceived by *Brāhmaṇas* also should have become *Brāhmaṇa*. That is not accepted [by you]. Moreover, merits resulted from acts such as sacrifices, engaging others into sacrifices, study, teaching, giving, accepting

offerings would also be perished with the perish of the *Brāhmaṇa* body. But that is not agreeable. Therefore, we think body is also not the factor to be *Brāhmaṇa.*

(Ḍa) Knowledge too is not *Brāhmana,* because of too many of knowledge. In that case, whosoever possess knowledge among the *Śūdras* would become Brāhmaṇas. In some it is seen that some *Śūdras* also are well-versed in the sciences of *Vedas, Grammars, Mīmānsā, Sāṃkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Nude (Jaina), Ājīvika* and so forth, but they are not *Brāhmaṇas.* Therefore, we think knowledge is also not the factor to be *Brāhmaṇa.*

(Ḍha) Manner is also not *Brāhmaṇa,* because, whoever follows would become *Brāhmaṇa.* In that case, whosoever adepts such manner, all would become *Brāhmaṇas.* It is seen that *Śūdras,* such as, the *Naṭas* (dancer), *Bhaṭas* (fighter), fishmongers, *Bhaṇḍas* (jester) following various acts of more skilled ones do not become *Brāhmaṇa.* Therefore, we think manner is also not the factor to be *Brāhmana.*

(Ṇa) Acts are also not *Brāhmaṇa,* because, it is seen that among the *Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas* and *Śūdras* also accomplish vaious acts, such as, sacrifice, engaging others into sacrifice, study, teaching, giving, taking offerings (of *Brāhmaṇa*-) acts. But they are not *Brāhmaṇa* according to your view. Therefore, we think act is also not the factor to be *Brāhmaṇa.*

(Ta) [Mastery over the] *Vedas* is also not Brāhmana, because, the demon king *Rāvaṇa* studied all the *vedas* viz., *Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva.* In addition, every house of the demons *veda* tradition were in practice. But they were not *Brāhmaṇas.* .

Therefore, we think mastery over *Veda* is also not the factor to be *Brāhmaṇa.*

(Tha) Then how one is conceived as the Brāhmanahood? It is said:

Brāhmaṇahood is neither by [knowing] the treatise,
Nor by sanctifying ceremonies, or by birth,
Nor by caste, or by [knowledge of] *Vedas,*
Nor by acts brought thereof. [13]

(Da) Refraining from all unwholesome deeds which is as pure as the *Kunda* flower and the moon is called the Brāhmaṇahood.

(Dha) It is said: Brāhmaṇahood is attained by strictly following the penance, vows, austerity, abstinence from food, giving, control of senses, and concentration of mind. It is also said in the *Dharmaśāstra (Veda):*

He who frees from mine and I sentiments;
Free of lust and possessions;
Free from attachment and hatred;
To that wiseone is recognized by the gods. [14]

It is said in all the scriptures:

Truth is *Brāhmaṇa,* austerity is *Brāhmaṇa;*
Control over senses is *Brāhmaṇa;*
Compassion to all beings is *Brāhmaṇa;*
These are the characteristics of a *Brāhmaṇa.* [15]

Absence of truth, absence of austerity;
Absence of control over senses;
Absence of compassion to all beings;
These are the characteristics of a *Caṇḍala* (lowly person). [16]

Those who do not engage into sexual misconduct,
Among the births of gods, men;
Women, animals;
They are *Brāhmaṇas* and the wiseones. [17]

Sukra [sage] also said:

"Birth is not seen [as the factor],
Good quality is only the [source of] doing good;
Even if a *Caṇḍala* possess them;
He is recognized by the gods as *Brāhmaṇa*." [18]

(Na) Therefore, neither birth, nor soul, nor body, nor knowledge, nor manner, nor acts, and nor [mastery over] *Veda* is not *Brāhmana*.

(Pa) Further you have said the following: "In this world, the *Śudras* are not entilted to receive renunciation [vow]. Their duty is only to serve the *Brāhmaṇa*. They are the lowest one as as they are cited last of all the four castes [in the scripture].

(Pha) If so, *Indra* (king of gods) becomes lowest., in accordance with the following aphorism of *Pāṇini*, [cf.*Pāṇini* 6-4-133] viz., "of dog, youth and Indra except in the *Taddhita*." Indeed, *Indra* is then lowest than the dog and the youth. But it is not seen so. Does one becomes lowest only because ones name is uttered in the last? Moreover, for example in the mundane world usages such as: *Umāmaheśvarau (Umā and Mahesvara), Dantauṣṭham* (teeth and lips) are seen. It does not fall that teeth came before lips or *Umā* born before *Maheśvara*. Here it is merely compound words and nothing else. So is the compound*: Brāhmaṇa-kṣatra-viṭ-śūdrah*

(Brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, Vaiśya and *Śūdra*). Therefore, your proposition which you hold, viz., "their duty is to serve the *Brāhmaṇa* does not hold any water.

(Ba) Furthermore, the subject of Brāmaṇahood is not certain (relevant).

Mānavadharma substantiate it:

> One who [*Brāhmana*] sleeps with *Śūdra* woman;
> Relishing the saliva dripping from her mouth;
> Touching the warm breaths coming from her nose;
> Begets a child in her never gets any remorse. [19]
>
> One who [*Brāhmaṇa*] eats cooked food;
> From a hand of a *Śūdra* woman successively for a month;
> As long as he lives, remains a *Śūdra* and
> After the death becomes a dog. [20]
>
> One who [*Brāhmaṇa*] is surrounded by *Śūdra* women;
> Who owns a *Śūdra* wife;
> Is ristricted the rites of gods and ancestors;
> Thereafter, goes to the *Raurava* (hell). [21]

(Bha) Therefore, on the authority of these words the *Brāhmaṇa* subject is not certain.

(Ma) Further, *Śūdra* also becomes *Brāhmaṇa*. What is the proof? *Mānavadharma* substantiates it as follow:

> The great sage *Kaṭha* was born
> From the womb of *Arṇī* (fire-wood);
> By austerity one becomes a *Brāhmaṇa;*
> Therefore, birth is not the cause. [22]

The great sage *Vyās* was born
From the womb of a fisher-woman;
By austerity one ecomes *Brāhmaṇa;*
Therefore, birth is not the cause. [23]

The great sage *Vasiṣṭha* was born
From the womb of *Urvaśī* (celestial damsel)
By austerity one ecomes *Brāhmaṇa;*
Therefore, birth is not the cause. [24]

The great sage *Ṛṣiśraṅga* was born
From the womb of a she-deer;
By austerity one becomes *Brāhmaṇa;*
Therefore, birth is not the cause.[25]

The great sage *Viśvamitra* was born
From the womb of a *Caṇḍalī;*
By austerity one ecomes *Brāhmaṇa;*
Therefore, birth is not the cause. [26]

The great sage *Nārada* was born
From the womb of a rice-husker maid;
By austerity one ecomes *Brāhmaṇa;*
Therefore, birth is not the cause. [27]

One who conquers the self;
Subdues the senses;
By austerity becomes chastity;
By *Brāhmācaryā* (celibacy) becomes *Brāhmaṇa.* [28]

All aforementioned are not born from a *Brāhmaṇa* mother;

But they are *Brāhmaṇa* to the mundane world;
Through morality and purity becomes *Brāhmaṇa,*
Therefore, birth is not the cause. [29]

Morality is the essential, not the birth;
What is the use of a good birth; if devoid of morality?
Many people are in the lower births,
On the morality basis, the steadfast goes to heaven. [30]

(Ya) Who are those *Brāhmaṇa* sages, viz., *Kaṭha, Vyāsa, Vasiṣṭha, Ṛṣyaśraṅga, Viśvamitra* and so forth? These *Brāhmaṇa* sages are born in the low births but are *Brāhmaṇas* because of mundane world. Therefore, on the authority of these words the *Brāhmaṇa* context is uncertain (irrelevant). A person even born in Śūdracaste also becomes *Brāhmaṇa.*

(Ra) In this context, you hold another view:

Brāhmaṇa is born from the mouth;
Kṣatriya is born from the arms;
Vaiśya is born from the thighs,
Whereas *Śūdra* is born from the feet. [31]

(La) In this context, we observe: There are many kinds of *Brāhmanas.* It is not known how all those got born from the mouth of the *Brahmā.* Since in this world *Brāhmaṇa* exists among the fishmongers, washerwomen and *Caṇḍala*-women. They also sanctify the ceremonies such as, keeping tuft hair [on the head], tying *Muñja* [grass] thread [around their vest], the stuff and so forth. They are also called *Brāhmaṇas.* In the same way like *Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya* and so forth also are same. Therefore, caste stands one not four.

(Wa) Again, how can there be four castes when they are born from the same person? In this world, for example a person named *Devadutta* gives four offsprings from a single wife. They do not have different castes, claiming this Brāhmaṇa, this *Kṣatriya,* this *Vaiśya* and this *Śūdra.* Because all are conceived from a single father. Then, how can there be four castes *Brāhmaṇa* and so forth.

(Śa) In this world, we find distinction in sex, form, colour, configuration, waste, urine, smell and in voice of animals such as, cow, buffalo, horse, elephant, donkey, monkey, goat, sheep etc. But not of *Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya* etc. Therefore, as there is no distinction, only one caste exists.

(Ṣa) Moreover, for example, we find distinction in form, colour, fur, beaks etc. of swan, pigeon, parrot, cuckoo, peacock etc. are seen. But not of the *Brāhmaṇa* and so forth. Therefore, as there is no distinction, only one caste exists.

(Sa) In this world, we find distinct foot-prints of cow, elephant, horse, lion, tiger and so forth we easily recognize, this is the foot-print of a cow, this of an elephant, this of a deer, this of a lion and this of a tiger foot-print. But it is not so in the case of *Brāhmaṇa* etc. among human beings. We can not define as this is the foot-print of a *Brāhmaṇa*, that is of a *Kṣatriya*, this is of a *Vaiśya* and that is of a *Śūdra.*Therefore, as there is no distinction of foot-prints, we see only one caste not four.

(Ha) Just as we find different kinds of trees, viz., *Vāṭa* (banayan), *Bakula* (mimusops elengi), *palāśa* (butea frondosa), *aśoka* (jonesia *aśoka*), tamāla (garcinia xanthocymus), *Nāgakeśara* (mesua roxburghii) etc. in their, stem, leaves, flowers, fruits, barks,

wood, seeds, juice and smell; we do not find so in the case of *Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya* and *Śūdra*; neither in their parts or limbs. Nor any distinction in their skin, flesh, blood, bone, semen, waste, colour, configure or distinction of birth are seen. Therefore, having no distinction, there is only one caste.

(Kṣa) Furthermore, Oh dear *Brāhmaṇa*! as there is also similarity of actions in happiness, suffering, in life, in death, in intellect, in behaviour, in death, in birth, in fear, sexual enjoyment etc. Therefore, there is no reason to differentiate *Brāhmaṇa* from others [castes].

(Tra) This too, you should ought to know that there is no distinction of colour of fruits whatsoever produced from the same tree. For example take the case of *Udumbara* and *paṇasa* fruits have no distinction. The fruits of these two trees, some grow from the branches, others from the stem, or trunk, some from the root, and some others just above the root but they have no such distinctions as, this is the *Brāhmaṇa* fruit, that is the *Kṣatriya* fruit, this is the *Vaiśya* fruit and that is the *Śūdra* fruit; because, they are produced from the same tree. Likewise, there is no such distinctions among human beings too, because, they are also born from the same person [*Brāhmaṇa*).

(Jña) Moreover, there is another fault in your proposition. If *Brāhmaṇa* is born from the mouth, then from where she-Brāhmaṇa originate? If the answer is from the mouth. Then alas! you certainly engage into illicit intercourse with your sister. So, in that case there is no licit and or illicit convention is possible for you. That is

contradictory to the norms of the mundane world. Therefore, Brāhmaṇahood is uncertain [irrelevant].

(Aa) You make distinction of the four castes on the basis of acts [performed by them]. As it was observed by *Vaiśampāyana* when he was asked by *Yudhiṣṭhira*: "The presentation of four castes were founded on the basis of division of labour."

The well-known son of *Pāṇḍu*
Called *Yudhiṣṭhira,*
Having came forth to *Vaiśampāyana*
Asked him with folded hands. [32]

Who are those that are called *Brāhmaṇas*?
Or what are their charateristics [of a *Brāhmaṇa*]?
Sir, I want to know this,
Explain it to me. [33]

Vaiśampāyana replied:

One who is adorned with qualities of tolerance so forth
Abandoned the weapons and eating meat;
Does not harm all sentient beings;
This is the first charactistic of *Brāhmaṇa*. [34]

One who does not take [anything] unless given;
Whether belonging to others;
Or lying on the road or in the house.
This is the second charactistic of *Brāhmaṇa*. [35]

One who has left cruelity in his nature,
Freed from selfishness and graspings;
Goes of free of attachment.
This is the third charactistic of *Brāhmaṇa*. [36]

One who has abandoned sexual misconduct,
Among gods, human being and women;
Even in animal births.
This is the fourth charactistic of *Brāhmaṇa* [37]

Truth is purity, compassion is purity;
Control over sense is purity;
Compassion to all beings is purity.
Purity is the fifth charactistic of *Brāhmaṇa.* [38]
One who accomplishes these five characteristics
Is the dvija or *Brāhmaṇa*
Oh! *Yudhiṣṭhira* I call him Brāhmaṇa,
Rest are *Śūdras.* [39]

Not by caste nor by birth;
Nor by acts one becomes *Brāhmaṇa.*
Even if a *Caṇḍala* abides in the good conduct.
Oh *Yudhiṣṭhira*! he is *Brāhmaṇa.* [40]

Vaiśampāyana said something more here:

Oh, *Yudhiṣṭhira*! in ancient times,
All world was one caste,
[But] due to distinction of functions
Four caste was established. [41]

All are mortals and born from the womb;
All have wastes and urine [inside],
All have same sense and sense-object.
Therefore, only with morality and good qualities men become *Brāhmaṇa.* [42]

Even, a *Śūdra* endowned with morality;
Becomes a good conduct *Brāhmaṇa*,
Even, a *Brāhmaṇa* devoid of good actions,
Is inferior to a *Śūdra*. [43]

Vaiśampāyana also said the following:

Oh, *Yudhiṣṭhira*! if a *Śūdra* too,
Cut across the vehement ocean of five senses;
For him
Immaculate wealth should be given. [44]

Oh, king! birth is not seen [as the factor],
Good quality is only the [source of] doing good;
Who lives a spiritual life,
Live for others benefit;
Practice tolerance for day and night,
To him the gods call *Brāhmaṇa*. [45]

Oh, the son of *Kuntī*! who abandons the household;
Stay longing for liberation,
Detached from attachment,
They are *Brāhmaṇas*. [46]

Who follows non-violence, selflessness,
Abandons egoism;
Frees from attachment and hatred,
This is the characteristic of *Brāhmaṇa*. [47]

Tolerance, compassion, control of [senses];
Truth, purity, recollection, pity;
learning, wisdom, belief in other world,
This is the characteristic of *Brāhmaṇa*. [48]

A *Brāhmaṇa* well-controlled
Well-versed only in the essence of *Gāyatrī,*
Is better than who amassed the four vedas but no control
Eating everything and selling all things.[49]

Oh, *Yudhiṣṭhira*! a *Brāhmaṇa* fasts for a night,
Attains the supreme state,
Cannot attain that state
[Even] making thousand sacrifices. [50]

Who Exels in all the *vedas;*
Sanctify all the pilgrims by water;
Frees from [worldly engagements] and follows the spiritual path.
He is called *Brāhmaṇa.* [51]

When one does not commit unhwholesome,
Towards any sentient being,
Through body, speech and mind.
Then, Brāhmaṇahood accomplishes. [52]

In order to destroy the ignorance of the *Brāhmaṇa*
Who have lost their power of intelligence,
Whatever I have said in this treatise is reasonable, then,
Wisemen accept it, reject it if found unreasonable. [53]

The text *Vajrasūcī* (Diamond Needle) ends here. This is composed by *Siddhācārya Aśvaghoṣa.* May all beings be happy.

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